United Nations A/61/544

General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 October 2006

Original: English

Sixty-first session
Agenda items 116 and 117

Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007

Enhancing the role of the subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on enhancing the role of the subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (A/61/471). The report was submitted in compliance with paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 60/235, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a plan of action to strengthen the subregional offices of ECA and to ensure the full implementation of the recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in its report on the inspection of programme and administrative management of the subregional offices (A/60/120).

2. OIOS has made 14 recommendations aimed at strengthening the capacity of subregional offices through: a more focused programming of their activities; the improved dissemination of information, emphasizing electronic means; a closer alignment of staff skills and expertise with subregional priorities; the consistent maintenance of staff strength at budgeted levels; the strengthening of administrative support to subregional offices; and the introduction of reliable mechanisms for cooperation among subregional offices and between subregional offices and ECA headquarters.

3. The Advisory Committee notes that in early 2006, the new Executive Secretary of ECA also undertook a comprehensive review with a view to repositioning the organization to better respond to the challenges facing Africa. The outcome of the review concurs with the conclusions of OIOS and prescribes a refocusing of the mandate and the mission of the subregional offices, the improvement of their products, services and delivery models, the development of new partnerships and the strengthening of the use of information and communication technologies.

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4. The action plan presented in the report under consideration (A/61/471) is formulated on the basis of the recommendations of OIOS and the conclusions of the comprehensive review. It sets out the Commission's proposals for implementing strategic reforms, including a governance framework and a new organizational structure, as well as clarifications on the mandate and mission of the subregional offices, the services they are expected to provide and the expected results. Specific actions to be taken in respect of the OIOS recommendations, with time frames and lines of managerial responsibility, are described in annex II to the report. The report also outlines the additional post and non-post resources required to implement the recommendations of OIOS and to support the additional activities stemming from the proposed enhancements of the mandate and mission of the subregional offices and the repositioning of ECA. These relate essentially to increased operational activities, the improvement of information and communication technology systems and expanded training requirements. The Advisory Committee notes that the implementation of the action plan is already under way, with activities planned during the bienniums 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. ECA expects to fund the additional resources required during the current biennium through redeployment of both staff and non-post resources to the subregional offices.

5. With respect to human resources, ECA indicates that it plans to deploy up to 30 per cent of its staff to the subregional offices and that this proportion, which was 21.1 per cent prior to the repositioning exercise, has increased to 22.2 per cent. However, the Advisory Committee was informed that ECA did not anticipate that the targeted level of 30 per cent could be reached in the biennium 2008-2009. **The Advisory Committee requests that progress towards the achievement of this target is monitored and included in future reports.**

6. It is proposed to increase the total staffing of subregional offices by 15 posts, including 13 Professional and 2 Local level posts, and to add 1 Professional post in the Office of the Executive Secretary to coordinate the activities of the subregional offices. Of these, ECA intends to redeploy five Professional and the two Local level posts from existing resources during the current biennium and to request resources for the nine remaining new posts to be created in the subregional offices in the 2008-2009 budget proposal. Upon request, the Advisory Committee was provided additional information on the proposed subregional office staff levels in 2006-2007 and in 2008-2009 showing that the total number of posts in the subregional offices would increase from 83 at present to 90 at the end of the biennium 2006-2007 and 98 in the biennium 2008-2009 (see annex I). ECA also indicated that at the end of August 2006, the vacancy rate at the Professional level stood at 16 posts, or 7.2 per cent, and at 0 per cent for local staff.

7. The Advisory Committee notes that an estimated additional $280,000 in non-post resources is required by each subregional office to fulfil its enhanced responsibilities during the current biennium, to be funded through redeployment of both regular and extrabudgetary resources. Upon request, the Committee was provided additional information indicating that as of September 2006, $116,000 had been identified for redeployment to subregional offices from regular budget non-post resources and a further $342,117 had been raised in extrabudgetary funds for two subregional offices. ECA indicated that efforts to identify additional resources for redeployment continued and that following the repositioning exercise and the adoption of a resource mobilization strategy, it expected to increase the level of extrabudgetary resources raised during 2007. The Committee notes that in the

current biennium, the average regular budget non-post resources for each subregional office amount to approximately $800,000 and that ECA had expected to raise some $2.3 million in extrabudgetary funds for the subregional offices.

8. In its report, OIOS highlighted the importance of information and communication technology to support information dissemination and outreach, improved integration with United Nations agencies in the subregions as well as improved coordination between ECA headquarters and the subregional offices. The actions proposed by ECA to strengthen the information and communication technology infrastructure and connectivity of the subregional offices as well as to improve the information content, services and products to be provided are outlined in annex II to the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/471), under the responses to OIOS recommendations SP-04-002-001, SP-04-002-003, SP-04-002-004, SP-04-002-005, SP-04-002-008 and SP-04-002-010. The Committee notes that most of these actions are planned to be completed during the biennium 2006-2007. Upon request, the Committee was provided additional information indicating that the costs for the enhancement of information and communication technology facilities of the subregional offices, including the acquisition of equipment and software, expert services to configure and install the computers and on-site training were estimated at some $250,000, which would be obtained through redeployment of existing resources to the extent possible. ECA provided additional details on the status of information and communication technology enhancements implemented during 2005 and 2006, which are contained in annex II to the present report.

9. The Advisory Committee notes that a framework for developing separate subprogrammes of work for each subregional office in the biennial budgets, with specific expected accomplishments and other elements of the logical framework, is proposed in annex II to the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/471), under the actions to be taken for recommendation SP-04-002-002.

10. **The Advisory Committee welcomes the results achieved in terms of improved vacancy rates, which have decreased from over 20 per cent and 6 per cent in 2003 to 7.2 per cent and 0 per cent for Professional and General Service posts, respectively (see para. 6 above). The Committee appreciates the efforts of ECA and its senior management to address the recommendations made by OIOS and the conclusions of its own review on the repositioning of the Commission, providing details on the actions to be undertaken in response to the recommendations of OIOS, estimated time frames and the designation of the responsible managers. However, the Committee is of the view that the analysis of OIOS, the comprehensive review of the Executive Secretary of ECA on the repositioning of the organization and the current policy aimed at achieving a significant shift towards operational rather than analytical work raise fundamental questions about the respective roles of the ECA headquarters and the subregional offices, as well as their integration with the other United Nations entities present in the subregions. It urges ECA to continue to review and define the role of the subregional offices in the context of the repositioning of ECA as a whole, with a view to achieving synergies and optimizing the use of existing resources with a greater balance between ECA headquarters subregional offices.**

11. **The Advisory Committee points out that at this stage, the estimates outlined for additional post and non-post resources for strengthening the**

resource base of the subregional offices are preliminary. It requests that the budget proposals to be established for the biennium 2008-2009 identify a clear linkage between the requested financial or human resources and the mandated activities. The number and level of posts requested should be fully justified and supported with a convincing analysis of what can realistically be carried out in the budget period. Furthermore, the budget document should indicate how the capacity already available at ECA has been taken into account when formulating requests for additional resources. An analysis of the possible impact of extrabudgetary funds on resource requirements should be included. The results achieved and lessons learned with respect to the actions undertaken during the current biennium should be carefully analysed and incorporated into the proposals for the next budget submission.

12. **The General Assembly may wish to note the actions already taken to implement the OIOS recommendations concerning the programme and administrative management of the subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa (A/61/471), without prejudice to such recommendations as the Advisory Committee may make on future proposals for resources and reorganization in the context of the ECA budget proposals for the biennium 2008-2009.**

Annex I

Enhancing the role of the subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa

Staffing table session 17A	*2006-2007*			*2008-2009*	
	Initial approved	*Proposed revised*	*Total proposed after redeployment*	*Proposed new posts*	*Total*
Policymaking organs	—	—	—	—	—
Executive direction and management	11	3	14	1	15
Information and communication services	8	—	8	—	8
Subtotal	**19**	**3**	**22**	**1**	**23**
Programme of work					
Subprogramme 1. Facilitating economic and social policy analysis	26	(10)	16	—	16
Subprogramme 2. Fostering sustainable development	27	(4)	23	—	23
Subprogramme 3. Strengthening development management	27	0	27	—	27
Subprogramme 4. Harnessing information for development	25	1	26	—	26
Subprogramme 5. Promoting trade and regional integration	35	(9)	26	—	26
Subprogramme 6. Promoting the advancement of women	20	5	25	—	25
Subprogramme 7. Supporting subregional activities for development					
Subregional office (North)	17	2	19	1	20
Subregional office (West)	16	1	17	2	19
Subregional office (Central)	16	2	18	1	19
Subregional office (Eastern)	17	—	17	2	19
Subregional office (South)	17	2	19	2	21
Subtotal, Subregional offices	**83**	**7**	**90**	**8**	**98**
Subprogramme 8. Development planning and administration	—	—	—	—	—
Subprogramme 9. Statistics	17	—	17	—	17
Subtotal, Programme of work	**260**	**(10)**	**250**	**8**	**258**
Programme support	221	6	227	—	227
Office of Strategic Planning and Programme Management	20	1	21	—	21
Subtotal	**241**	**7**	**248**	**—**	**248**
Grand total	**520**	**—**	**520**	**9**	**529**

Annex II

Information and communication technology enhancements implemented in subregional offices in 2005 and 2006

1. Implemented VSAT installation with full indoor and outdoor equipment allowing:
   - Improved access to the Internet
   - Access to the Intranets of United Nations Headquarters, ECA and other United Nations offices
   - Access to the private telephone system of ECA with access to inter-mission links and less expensive long-distance service providers
   - Access to enterprise applications, such as IMDIS, ePAS, Galaxy, IMIS and ODS.
2. Delivered satellite modems to improve connectivity and enable videoconference service.
3. Replaced all network switches and routers to improve connectivity via VSAT.
4. Installed Ericsson PABX in all subregional offices and delivered new telephone sets with state-of-the-art billing systems.
5. Provided videoconferencing equipment, television screens, videoconferencing cameras and document cameras.
6. Provided 10-15 desktop personal computers to each subregional office.
7. Provided seven laptops to the subregional offices.
8. Provided a network printer to each subregional office.
9. Provided a mid-level server to replace and upgrade old Lotus/Domino servers.
10. Upgraded the Lotus Notes systems in all subregional offices to version 6.5.1.
11. Replaced outdated servers in all subregional offices.
12. Installed a Citrix application server in ECA headquarters and Citrix clients in subregional offices for IMIS access in the field.
13. Provided content engines for content management.